People Success Toolkit

Return to the Flexible Workplace

GLINT

Dear Senior Leader,

The pandemic transformed the way we work. In the shift to dispersed work, employees and teams learned to stay productive and happy in their roles, and they appreciated the flexibility of working from home. At the same time, however, burnout and isolation became more significant issues than ever before. Today, employees are asking for the best of both worlds: hybrid work.

According to the Microsoft Work Trend Index 2021, 73% of employees want flexible remote work options, but 67% also want more in-person collaboration post-pandemic. 80% of managers say they expect more flexible work-from-home policies post-pandemic, and 66% of leaders say they're considering redesigning office space for hybrid work. And the stakes couldn't be higher for organizations looking to retain talent—41% of employees are considering leaving their current employer, and 46% say they're likely to leave because they can now work remotely.

Given the shift toward hybrid work, companies are making decisions that impact employee and customer experience for years to come. There are many considerations when deciding how employees will work within an organization going forward. The framework below outlines some of the key decisions to consider as you navigate changes in your work, workplace, and workforce. Aligning on these decisions early will enable your organization to determine how to continuously measure people success, particularly as you shift from pre-COVID to post-COVID ways of working.

Based on our experience, a few core people-centric habits can make a big difference in helping organizations understand and respond effectively to employee needs while shepherding organizations through change:

- Frequently gather employee feedback
- Focus on what's most important
- Acknowledge and celebrate wins

I'm pleased to share this toolkit, and I hope you and your team find it informative and helpful.

I'd also love to hear what you think. Please message me [LinkedIn] if you have questions, would like to learn more, or want to connect with others who are working through these same challenges.

Justin Black
Head of Glint People Science at LinkedIn

An HR Leader's Playbook: Return to Work

There is no one-size-fits-all playbook for bringing employees back to the workplace. While some industries can create flexible work arrangements, others have workers that are required to show up for roles that can only be done in a physical environment. This can even be true for different functions within a single organization. Add the web of government guidelines and local factors, and it makes for a complex process to bring employees back to the workplace.

It's important to first define hybrid and flexible work environments. Hybrid workplaces include some segments of employees working in the office while others work remotely. This may include an individual who works a specific number of days in the office and the remainder remotely. It may also include segments of the workforce who are entirely remote while others are in the office. Flexible workplaces refer to non-traditional working arrangements, often involving some degree of working remotely. Flexibility may apply to location and/or schedule.

There is one factor that will yield positive returns on all fronts: checking in with employees and involving them in the return to workplace journey. Three organizational habits can help you understand people's needs and respond effectively:

Habit 1
Get Feedback and Insights

Habit 2
Focus on what's most important

Habit 3
Acknowledge and celebrate wins

Let’s take a look at where you can begin.

Stay connected, understand, and respond to employee needs

Here are a few high-impact practices you can adopt today.

- Frequently gather employee feedback on critical topics
- Have regular team and one-on-one conversations to ensure people are feeling safe and supported as they return to work
- Share progress by acknowledging and celebrating wins

Habit 1

Get Feedback and Insights

When should we survey our employees?

Consider surveying prior to opening the workplace to inform planning as well as a few weeks after employees have returned to make adjustments that will aid in longer term success. Items related to returning to the workplace and hybrid or flexible work can be part of a short, regular pulse (Glint recommends monthly pulsing during times of major change). After that, adopt a regular pulsing cadence to continue to monitor and respond to people’s needs while working in the new model longer-term (Glint recommends quarterly pulsing during more stable times). There is a good chance that people will change their minds about where and how they prefer to work after employees have tested new routines for several months. Ongoing pulsing will allow you to remain flexible and adapt to employee needs.

What should we ask?

Deploying a short pulse survey to employees can uncover practical advice to make both return to the workplace and hybrid work safe and effective. If you’re already pulsing or just starting, consider asking these questions to ensure returning to the workplace and long-term flexible work options are successful over time (Unless noted otherwise, we suggest you ask each item on a 5pt scale, with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strongly Agree.”):

eSat?	How happy are you working at <COMPANY_NAME>? (“Not at all happy” to “Completely happy”)
Flexibility	I am satisfied with my ability to choose when and where I work.
Well-being	<COMPANY_NAME> takes a genuine interest in the employees' well-being.
Belonging	I feel a sense of belonging at <COMPANY_NAME>.
Employee Connection	<COMPANY_NAME> is doing a good job helping employees feel connected to one another.
Support-Manager	I can get the support I need from my manager.
Resources	I have the resources I need to do my job well.
Return Concern (Pre-Return)	What is your biggest concern as it relates to returning to the workplace? (Choose up to two options. Skip if you are currently in the workplace.) a) staying healthy and safe in the workplace b) safely commuting to work c) the need to still care for children or family members d) managing my workload e) I would prefer to continue working from home f) I have no concerns, I’m ready to be back in the workplace g) other
Return Excitement (Pre-Return)	What are you looking forward to as it relates to returning to the workplace? (Choose up to two options. Skip if you are currently in the workplace.) a) Collaborating in person b) Social interactions with colleagues and clients c) Access to development opportunities d) Building my network outside of my team e) Opportunities to contribute my ideas f) On-site amenities (e.g. food, coffee, gym, etc.) g) Doing focused work h) Access to tools and technology i) Other (please specify)
Working Location	(Only ask this if you do not have the ability to track this as a demographic in your HRIS data): What is your current work location? a) I work full time in the workplace b) I work full time from my home c) I flex between the workplace and home
Hybrid Success (Open-Ended)	What do you need most to be successful in a hybrid work environment?

Who should see the results?

Share employee pulse feedback at the organizational and manager-level to ensure actions address what matters most to people by geography, function, personal circumstances, etc. From an enterprise view, corporate teams, such as HR, IT, facilities, and security can use pulse results to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to help employees return to an environment that is safe and/or work successfully in a hybrid world., For example, innovative technology or work schedules may be required to help teams with in-office and remote employees. We also recommend reviewing results by work-location demographic to track trends over time by workstyle (e.g., fully remote, fully in office, hybrid worker).

Empowering managers and teams to address individual concerns also helps people create a work experience that suits their needs and be most effective. Managers can help stagger work shifts to ensure social distancing requirements are maintained, identifying technology to enable teams to collaborate in a hybrid environment, or adjusting meeting format to be most effective for teams. To make this a reality, release pulse results to managers and encourage frequent team and individual conversations.

Habit 2

Focus on what's most important

Conversations are the best way to fuel action based on pulse insights—they build trust, ensure effective prioritization of work and goals, surface roadblocks and resource needs, and commit to ongoing action. Managers and employees should be having regular one-on-one meetings in support of the transition to a new set of workplace norms. One-on-ones provide the opportunity to ensure that individual needs are being addressed and create focus and commitment to what is most important for individual success. Consider adding these questions to regularly scheduled one-on-ones:

Before Returning to a Flexible/Hybrid Work Environment:

Have you seen our [new] hybrid work policy and do you have any questions for me? Given the type of work you are focusing on and your own well-being, what is your ideal work setting (i.e., work from home full time, work from the office full time, flex between home and work)?

What is on your mind as you think about returning to the workplace? What would help you feel comfortable when you choose to come into the workplace?

After Flexible/Hybrid Working Is in Progress:

How are you doing with the adjustments to a flexible/hybrid work environment? What's one thing I or the team can do to make things easier for you?

What other support or resources do you need to help you be successful while working between your home office and the workplace?

In addition to one-on-ones, team conversations are critical to help create focus in a hybrid working environment. Providing flexible work options will mean teams are likely to be distributed and need to establish new team norms for collaboration, communication, and connection. Using pulse insights to fuel ongoing team conversations around flexible work will be critical for identifying key actions to take as a team, but regularly checking in with your team will ensure flexible work is a success. Here are some questions to consider posing during your regularly scheduled team meetings:

Before Returning to a Flexible/Hybrid Work Environment:

Have you all seen our [new] hybrid work policy and do you have any questions for me? Given the work we need to accomplish as a team, what new team norms do we need to establish for how we work together? (Consider reviewing this LinkedIn Learning course for some ideas).

What is on your minds as you think about returning to the workplace? What would help us all feel comfortable when we are all together in the workplace?

After Flexible/Hybrid Working Is in Progress:

How are we doing with the adjustments to a hybrid work environment? What's one thing we can do as a team to make things easier for each other while working in this new environment?

What other support or resources do we need to collaborate, communicate, and/or connect better with each other?

Habit 3

Acknowledge and celebrate wins

Employees are eager to understand what the future will look like. It is important to recognize and communicate actions on a regular basis. Look for opportunities to acknowledge and publicly celebrate wins along the way. Similarly, continue to measure success and identify adjustments that might be needed. As organizations build more flexibility and adaptation into their culture it is critical to assess how these elements are working for employees and the organization alike. Glint recommends incorporating questions related to these elements into your regular pulse surveys.

Return from Furlough Learning Resources

A collection of free learning resources to help you and your organization build skills to support the return to the workplace.

Glint: Reimagining Productivity in the New World of Work: It's All About Trust and Focus

LinkedIn Roundup: What it takes to go back to work

LinkedIn: People Success Forum: Building the New World of Work

LinkedIn Learning: What's Next: Reinventing Work in the New Normal

LinkedIn Talent Blog: Josh Bersin on People-Centric Managers and the Future of Remote and Flexible Work

Microsoft: Research-backed Best Practices for Hybrid Workplaces

Microsoft: Hybrid Workplace Flexibility Guide

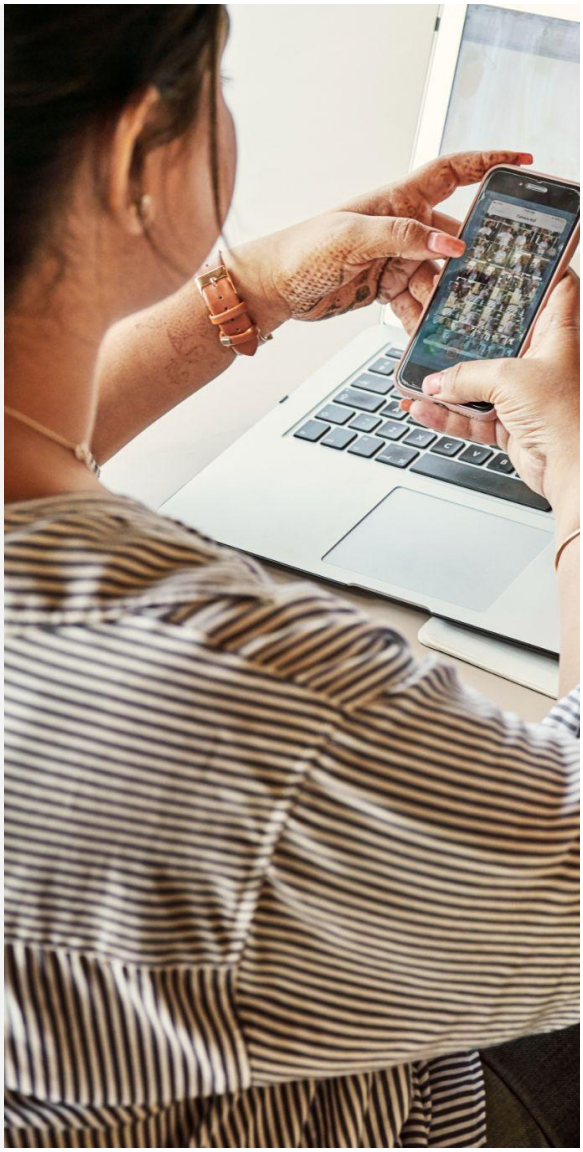
Microsoft: Hybrid Work: A Guide for Business Leaders

Josh Bersin: The Back to Work Playbook

Fast Company: 5 Changes to Expect in the Workplace After Covid-19

SHRM: Managing Flexible Work Arrangements

Link to Christina's PSE (Hybrid work environments)



Get Started

Actions to Support Returning to the Workplace and Hybrid Work

Here are some specific actions to support a people-centric approach to returning to the workplace and hybrid work. We've broken it down for each level of your organization. Because every organization is different, start where it makes the most sense for you – whether that's starting small and building from your success, or doing them all at once.

Organization

- Communicate frequently and transparently about the strategy for returning to the workplace and flexible/hybrid work options.
- Acknowledge we're all still learning as we go. Commit to being agile and adapting as workplaces reopen and flexible work arrangements are utilized.
- Regularly pulse to understand how the shift is impacting employees and how needs are evolving.
- Empower managers to have conversations with their teams about how they can support returning to the workplace and leverage flexible/hybrid work arrangements. Help managers reset performance expectations with a focus on impact and output vs. time in the office. Encourage managers of hybrid teams to help each member feel connected regardless of work location.

Manager

- Know your company's policies and procedures around returning to the workplace and flexible work options.
- Empower each member of your team to make decisions that will best support their productivity and well-being. Have regular check-ins to ensure they feel supported.
- Have a conversation about team norms to determine the best ways to promote collaboration, belonging, and productivity in a hybrid work environment.
- In hybrid meetings with both on-site and virtual participants, actively facilitate to ensure everyone has equal opportunity to provide input.

Employee

- Share your perspective with your manager and through surveys about your ideal work setting.
- Surface ideas that can help the organization and your team be more successful with this transition (e.g., collaborate on a team norms document within your working group).
- If things are going smoothly for you, consider checking in with one or two teammates regularly to offer support.